

The proper British actor who invented Captain Picard and is bringing him to the big screen talks about the agony of "Star Trek" costumes, the ecstasy of a certain country music songstress and the oddity of being mistaken for Ben Kingsley.

Patrick Stewart *by martha frankel*

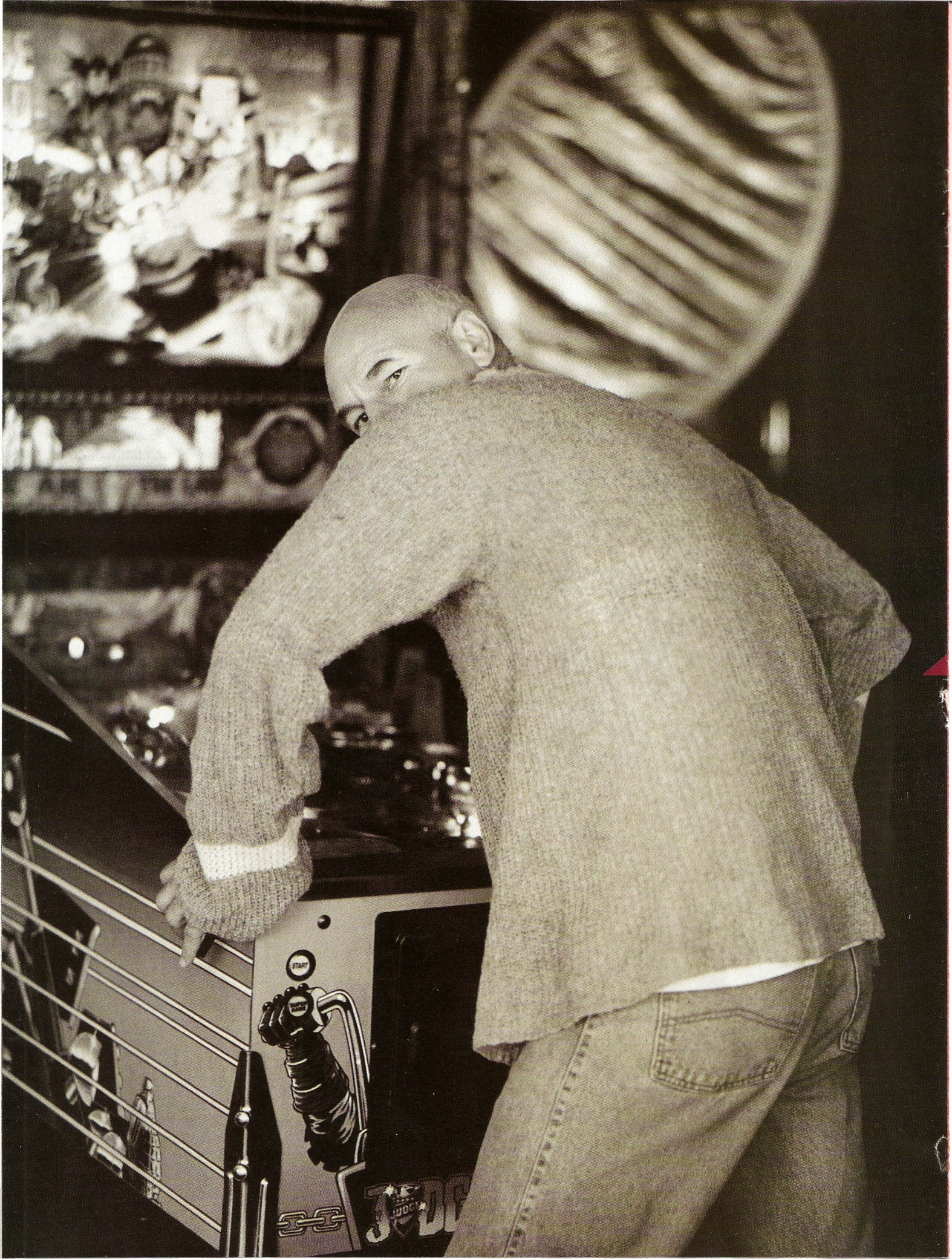
THE NEXT GENERATION

It's a perfect New York day, and it only seems more perfect when, on the corner outside the hotel where Patrick Stewart is staying while he shoots Paul Rudnick's *Jeffrey*, I see a woman in a shirt hardly long enough to cover her crotch. The woman turns out to be Heidi Fleiss. I can't wait to tell this story to Stewart.

When Stewart opens the door, I realize I'm not going to tell him anything for the moment, because I'm struck dumb by how handsome he is. He's wearing faded jeans and a gray T-shirt. His feet are bare. He's got a gray goatee. His posture is impeccable.

"You're so much taller than I pictured you to be," I blurt out, standing in the doorway and not moving.

"And I'm not even tall," he says, drawing me into the room, depositing me



on one of the flower-covered couches that look out on the Manhattan skyline, and taking a seat at the opposing couch.

"For an actor . . ." I begin to say.

"Oh," he says, smiling, "in that context, I *am* tall."

"On the show, it's hard to tell, because of that costume, which, by the way, looks like the most uncomfortable thing ever worn. Is that why you kept tugging it every time you moved?"

"Oh, you noticed that?" Stewart says, eyes squinting. "The costumes were a couple of sizes too small, because they wanted them to be as tight and smooth as possible. The material pulled on every part of the body, and after 18 months my chiro-

time I did 'Star Trek,' I developed these one-man shows, to keep flexing my theater muscles. My background had been mostly in theater, so you don't want to lose that wonderful feeling of performing before a live audience. Anyhow, one of those shows is about the authority figures that I've played throughout my career. . . emperors, kings, princes, barons, prime ministers, party bosses, trade-union leaders, whatever. At one point I say, 'And of course, this list of leaders would not be complete without one of the heroes that I've played.' And I walk over and go to my chair, and I do this." He does the Picard tug. "The crowd went wild, I didn't have to say a thing. Actually, Paramount wouldn't let me say anything! They saw an advertisement for

pening, and my finger hovered over the button, but it just went on hovering, because I didn't understand what was going on, but there were these extraordinary-looking people. What I had tuned in to was the Country Music Awards. The camera was panning along people sitting in the front row, and it passed by this redhead. That's all it did. And I leaned forward in my chair, as if I could have made the camera pan back again. Literally, my heart skipped a beat when I saw this woman. Of course, everyone in the world knew who she was, except me. Thank God some 10 minutes later she suddenly appeared on the stage and she sang. At that moment I was hooked. I went out that day and I bought *The Best of Reba McEntire* . . ."

A very well-known elderly movie star saw me and opened his arms and said, 'Oh, you're fantastic, where's the photographer?' I was dizzy with delight. We had our photographs taken with his wife, and then he turned to me and said, 'Mr Kingsley, this has been a great honor.'"

practor said, 'You have to tell the studio unless they take you out of the costume you're going to sue them for the damage it's doing to your body.' So we changed to a two-piece costume. But with both costumes, they were beautiful when you stood still or moved as if you were on parade, but the moment you were active or sat down, they didn't look so good. One of the few ways to keep that smooth look was to do this"—here he gives the famous Picard movement, taking the front of his shirt with both fists and yanking downward. "I did it as a mere practical gesture the first year. And then word came back to me that it was catching on. People were imitating it, comedians were picking up on it. Then I started doing it with different qualities of action. I used it as an emotional tool, a gesture."

"I thought I was just noticing some tic," I say.

"Oh no, it's not a tic. During the

the show, which said 'From Henry V to Captain Picard,' and they called my agent and said, 'We hope that Patrick isn't doing anything from "Star Trek," because that, of course, would be a breach of copyright.'" A decidedly un-Picardish smile is playing on Stewart's face.

"Did you just win a shopping spree at Tower Records?" I ask, nodding in the direction of the stereo system and hundreds of classical CDs, most still in their wrappings.

Stewart laughs. "I've come quite late in my life to music, and like many latecomers, I've become obsessive."

"Somebody told me that you were a Reba McEntire freak," I say, although now I'm pretty sure my informant was mistaken.

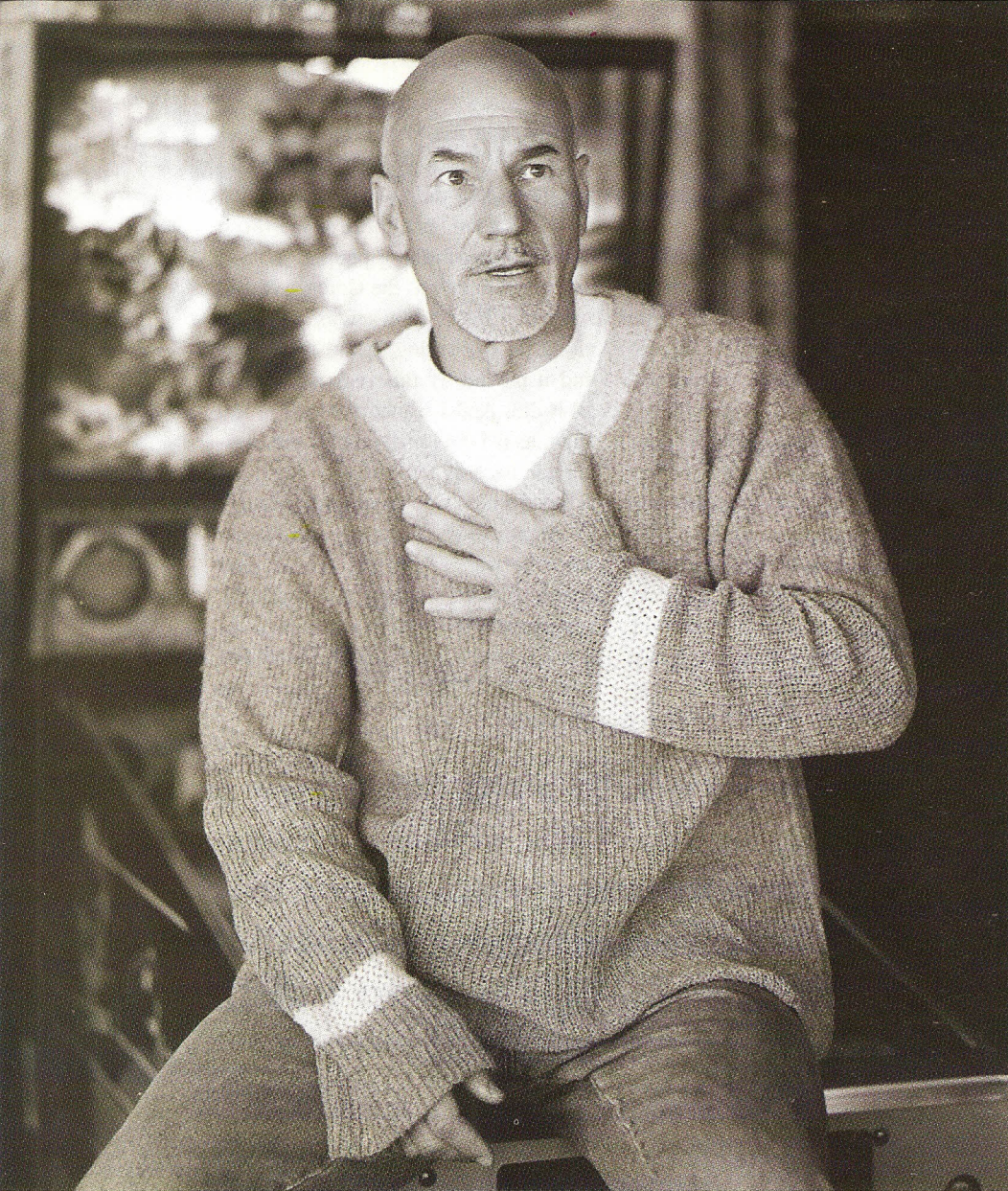
Stewart actually blushes. "It was one of those things. I remember the very first time I saw her. In my first year living in America, I was switching channels and this event was hap-

"You don't look the type," I say.

"What you'll find, Martha, is that I have lots of surprises up my sleeve. And anyone who can sing, 'I walked into the kitchen, silverware's gone, furniture's missing, guess he got it all . . . ' that's my kind of woman. One night I was on Leno. It was only some 15 minutes before we went on the air, and I said, 'By the way, who's doing the show?' And they said, 'Reba McEntire.' My knees turned to jelly. So I immediately found out where her dressing room was and knocked on the door and gushed. Then I went on the show and talked about her for most of the time. In fact, she asked if I could come on all her appearances! She even kissed me on camera, which was just delightful." He closes his eyes and smiles.

"Hello," I say, calling him out of his reverie. "Captain Kirk was quite a womanizer, right?"

"That's right, yes, romance was



the show..."

"I don't believe that my situation had anything to do with the studio pulling the show. [If I'd left] I think they would have replaced me without a backward glance."

"That's true," I agree.

Stewart raises that eyebrow, as if he wished I'd told him how indispensable he was. "You're right... none of us are that exceptional that we can't be replaced, even though we'd like to think we are. The studio said that they were very anxious to begin to develop feature films with our cast, that they felt that it wasn't realistic to go on making movies with the original cast, and they didn't want their movie actors to be available every week during a TV series. In a sense, we were kicked upstairs."

"Do you realize that you may never be as famous as you are right now?" I say.

"I don't think that's necessarily true," he says, cringing.

"What were the numbers on the last segment of 'Next Generation'? Thirty million people watched it? Maybe 35 million? You'd have to sell a hell of a lot of movie tickets to draw that same audience..."

He doesn't miss a beat. "That's what we're hoping this *Star Trek* movie is. It's called *Star Trek Gener-*

Anyone who can sing, 'I walked into the kitchen, silverware's gone, furniture's missing, guess he got it all...' that's my kind of woman."

high in his life."

"So what about Captain Picard? He never seemed to be with a woman."

"Well, there have been episodes of romance. For the first couple of years, there were several. Most of the romancing in the series was based upon the sudden appearance in Picard's life of someone from his past, with a pastel-colored, wistful sense of what might have been if things had been different. It's boring, very boring."

"I know he was a good leader, but I wanted him to get laid," I say.

"He got laid. He got laid at least twice," Stewart says, looking pleased.

"Twice in seven years?"

"There are those who would say that it probably should have happened more often, but it was never quite that explicit. But yes, indeed, he did get laid, and you know what? It was good for him. It generally is."

"How come Paramount canceled 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' when it was still one of the most popular shows on television? There are people who say they did it because you refused to go on any longer with

ations, and quite frankly, I'm a little disappointed, because I had come up with a good name, *Star Trek: Rites of Passage*, and for a while it looked like they were going to use it. But then they went back to *Generations*. Bill Shatner, Captain Kirk, is also in this film. I've read reports that said we didn't get along, and I'd like to go on record as saying that that's a lie, we got along fine. I liked working with him very much. One of the best parts of the film is that the director, David Carson, that's C-A-R-S-O-N..."

I'm laughing.

"Well," says Stewart, "I was a journalist for a short time before I became an actor, so I always spell things out. Anyway, Carson is an Englishman, and given the fact that the guest star in the movie is Malcolm McDowell, well, the place was crawling with Brits. It was a remarkable shoot. The last three weeks we were on location with some of the most dramatic scenery that I've ever witnessed, and the climax of the movie happens on the top of a 500-foot pinnacle rock in the northeastern Nevada desert."

"How'd you all get up there?"

"Up a rope," he says.

"Oh, come on. They let the star of their movie climb up a rope?"

"I swear to you. Every single person did it—grips, camera crew, make-up artists, and director—because if you didn't get up there, you didn't work. We were on top of this rock for five days. Brutal conditions, temperatures of 105 degrees. It was grim. There was a strong wind blowing. It was dangerous. And, in fact, one day we had to abandon simply because we were in danger of being blown off the rock."

"That would have been a fitting end to the movie, if you and Bill Shatner were last seen being blown off the rock." The very thought has both of us laughing.

"Does this movie have the same sort of cheesy sets that the TV show had?"

It's hard to describe how offended Stewart gets. He pulls himself up and glares at me. "I unequivocally reject that allegation," he says.

"I didn't mean to insult you," I say in my own defense. "But I've always marveled at how, when the doors open and close on the ship, you can practically see the two guys behind it, pulling. And the control boards, I mean come on..."

Stewart lightens up. "Okay, on occasions, yes, there have been moments that there's a certain whiff in the air. Usually when it's to do with rocks or scenery."

"That's what I mean."

"As far as the ship is concerned,

I've always believed in that ship. But, yes, everything was upgraded for the movie. Everything. And the new sets that were built were breathtaking, awesome. So I guess I can understand what you mean, but I never would have phrased it like that."

"I'm a master of phrasing," I say. "Did you have any money before 'Star Trek'?" I think I've just proved my point.

"Ah, I was never in debt..."

"But were you wealthy?"

"No, no. Not at all. The last seven years have really been a dramatic change, yes. This kind of security was something that I have never expected, no actor ever should, because they would become very unhappy very quickly. And I have truly loved what I've done in my life. I think I've been very blessed, very fortunate, to have had the experiences I've had for 30 years, because I'm rarely happier than when I'm working. So, for me, to have had all those years in the theater in England, and to have done years of rep, a different play every week as I moved up to better and better companies, play after play, role after role after role after role, late nights just spent cramming lines for the next day, no sleep, going in to work and doing a show... that was such a fine time. And then I joined the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1966. Which was the culmination of everything I ever wanted to do."

"Does everybody recognize you, wherever you go?"

"Yes, it's commonplace. I have a collection of hats and caps I keep everywhere because I always feel this is the part," and here he points to his head, "that I have to conceal, but even then, they seem to know who I am. Ben Kingsley is one of my best friends. That's K-I-N-G-S-L-E-Y, in case you're not sure. I picked him up at a hotel not long ago in L.A., and I was driving my convertible. It was in the early evening and we were going out for dinner. I said, 'Do you want to put the top up?' and he said, 'No, no, this is beautiful.' And we started driving, and there was silence for a moment, and he said, 'Have you ever considered that anyone driving behind you will

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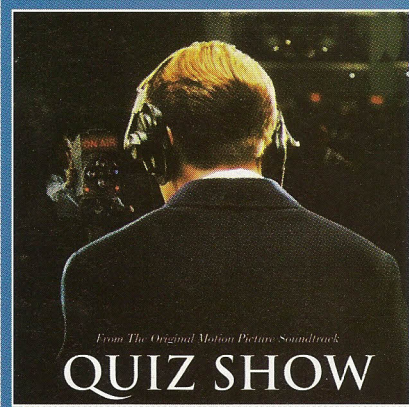
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Patrick Stewart

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think the world has been invaded by an alien race?" Because neither of us has much hair." He throws his head back and laughs.

"Ben and I, we look alike. I'll tell you a great story. I was at one of those Hollywood events, black tie, and when I arrived, a very, very well-known elderly movie star saw me come in, and opened his arms. And I looked around to see who he was looking to embrace, because I knew he didn't know me. But I knew who he was. I was impressed. And he said out loud, 'My God, I love this man. Oh, you're fantastic... where's the photographer? Get him over here.' I was just dizzy with delight. And I called out, 'Hi. Hey, hi.' And so we had our photographs taken with his wife, and then he turned to me and said, 'Mr. Kingsley, this has been a great honor.' 'Well,' I said, 'it's been a great honor for me, too.' The only problem was that I was due to give a speech at this event..."

"You didn't tell him?"

"No, I didn't. I couldn't. He was so deeply in the shit. And I respected him so much."

"So who is it?"

"I couldn't tell, it's impossible that I could tell you."

"No, it's possible. It's not in the realm of impossible," I say with some authority.

"But I won't."

"Ah..."

"A few weeks later, Ben told me that he was in L.A. and someone came over to him and said, 'Mr. Stewart, I've just got to tell you that I love your work, I think you're a wonderful actor and I've always...' Now Ben was a little bit more sedentary than me. He said, 'I'm terribly sorry, but I'm not Patrick Stewart, my name is Ben Kingsley.' And she looked blankly at him and he said, 'Oh, I am actually a very good friend of Patrick Stewart's.' And she said, 'Well, congratulations on being a good friend of his.' Ben just laughed and laughed when he told me this."

"Last year, I saw this fascinating documentary on serial killers. Weren't you the narrator?"

"Oh, wasn't that a great piece of work? The producer, Mark Olshaker, that's O-L-S-H-A-K-E-R, has been a friend of mine for quite a long time, and he made a documentary about Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* in England, and because I knew Ken when he was first in this business—I auditioned him, and then employed him. He was the most brilliant and most gifted young actor that I had ever seen. Who knew what an epic figure he would become? Anyway, the producer asked me if I would narrate this documentary about Ken, which I did. And then he said he'd find something else for me to do. Then he sent this shocking documentary about serial killers. The best part was that he found out that the guys at the FBI were some of the biggest fans of 'Star Trek: The Next Generation,' and that there's a standing invitation to go to Washington and look around the FBI offices, which I will definitely do someday. What a treat that will be."

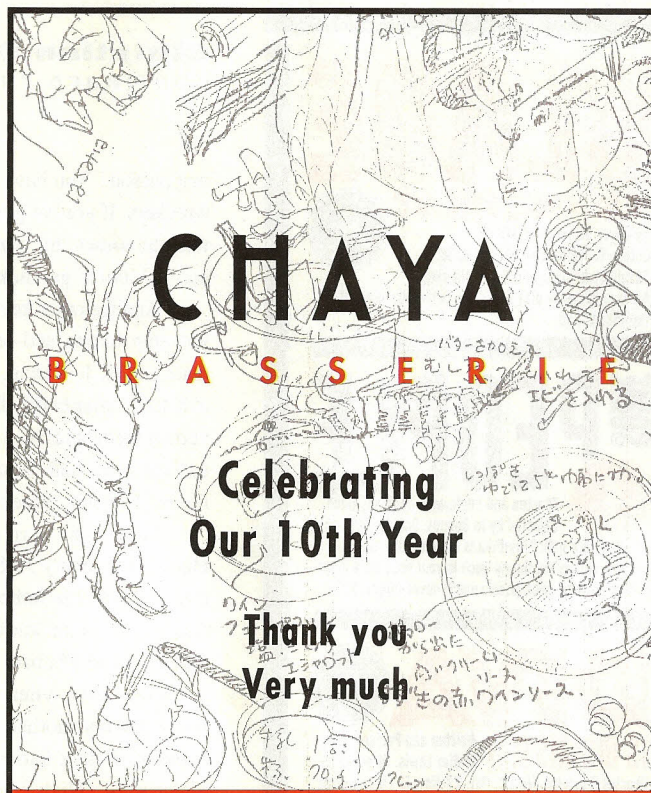
"In *Jeffrey*, you'll play a gay man..."

"Yes, that's a treat."

"Is this the first gay character you have ever played?"

For a while, Stewart says absolutely nothing. I think I might have offended him, although I can't imagine how. Finally, he clears his throat and says, "So far as I'm aware, yes."

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"And in *The Pagemaster*..." I barely finish saying the name of the film before Stewart jumps in.

"I think this film's going to be extraordinary. It begins with live actors, Macaulay Culkin, and then it switches to animation and fantasy. And that's when my part comes in. I play a character called Adventure, who leads him through the world of adventure. This kid is so timid, he keeps an earthquake survival kit by his bike. He goes to the library and he falls and hits his head, and out of these books come three animated figures, Adventure—who is a pirate in the Long John Silver school; Fantasy, whose voice is Whoopi Goldberg's; and Horror. These three make a deal with him, in that if he uses his library card to get them out of there, because they haven't been taken out for a long time, then they will show him a great time. He meets Moby Dick. Every kind of thrilling, terrifying, exhilarating, awful fantasy that a boy can have, he does. And he changes. It's about courage, but it's also a film about the importance of reading."

"Is that M-O-B-Y?" I ask, but Stewart doesn't respond.

"I know you don't like talking about your personal life..."

"No, I don't." He walks to the window, turns on the air conditioner, turns it off and sits back down. "Yes, I was married, I am no longer. I have two children, both sons. One of them is an actor, a very good one, Daniel Stewart. They're both currently living in England, but they have spent a lot of time here. I have two brothers, they have a wife each, and I adore them, and they have seven children between them, and their children have children, and it's a great family. My parents aren't alive, but I wish they could have seen the success I've had. They would have been proud. And that about tidies the whole thing up, don't you think?"

And it would have, too, but a few weeks later, when I call Stewart to check on a couple of things, I find him in his hotel room, with a voice that's almost unrecognizable.

"This has happened to me only two or three times in my life," he whispers, "because I have a voice like weathered leather. But everyone has a point... either their stomach gets upset or their back goes out. And this is what happened to me. My voice is telling me to stop, which I can in about four more days, and then I'm going to Mexico with my girlfriend..."

"Ummmm," I say, "a girlfriend, huh?"

"I was not confident enough to talk to you about this when we first met, but I am now. Although I'm not going to tell you who she is, just that there is such a person."

"I'm happy for you," I say.

"Yes, this is indeed very good for me. Very, very good."

"Is she an actress?" I ask, as if we're playing 20 questions.

"No, not an actress, but, nevertheless, an entertainer. I felt that when you were here I was being unnecessarily guarded in my responses and now I feel that wasn't necessary. There is someone in my life that I'm involved with and she's making me tremendously happy, and I'm feeling better about everything... my career, my relationships with my kids, better than I ever did before. And I wanted to say that to you." Which just tidies things up a bit more, don't you think?

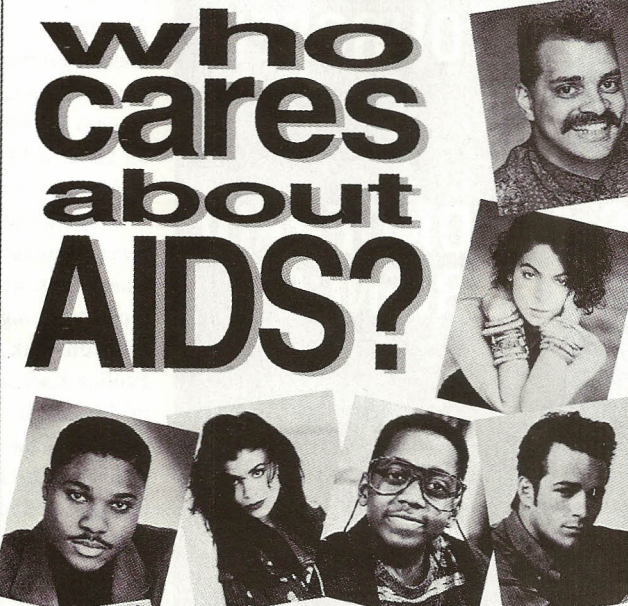
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